



Great Salt Lake

History

Lake Bonneville was the fresh water predecessor to the Great Salt Lake. Its size peaked roughly 19,000 years ago at 346 miles long, 145 miles wide and 1,230 feet deep. It occupied over 20,000 square miles of what are now western Utah and parts of Idaho and Nevada.

Outpouring from a break at its northeastern edge - an area now known as Red Rock Pass in Idaho – lowered the lake by nearly 400 feet approximately 17,300 years ago. Subsequent periods of drier climate caused the Lake to further shrink in stages, now revealed as terraces on hills and mountains surrounding the Salt Lake Basin.

Today's Great Salt Lake is a Bonneville remnant, in fluctuating existence for the past 14,000 years. Its four shoreline elevations are, in order of creation: Stansbury Level (4445 ft.), Bonneville Level (5250 ft.), Provo Level (4870 ft.) and Gilbert Level (4275 ft.). Because of “crustal rebound” both the Bonneville and Provo shorelines today appear at higher elevations in central parts of the lake basin than around the edges.

Archeological evidence suggests that the wetlands formed around the east, north, and south shores of the Great Salt Lake provided significant resources for both native American and European visitors and occupants during the past 12,000 years. Fossil evidence found includes two types of musk oxen, the mammoth, a horse, a camel, mountain sheep, two types of bison, and a giant bear.